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President Bush's new budget earmarks \$125 million in construction funding for the Great Lakes Naval Station, nearly \$100 million of which will be used to complete construction of the new Veterans Administration/Navy hospital in North Chicago.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, who has been working on the project for the last five years, said the fact that money has been earmarked for the hospital expansion is good news for the veterans and Navy personnel of Lake County.

"Now that money has been officially requested in the budget makes it overwhelmingly likely that it's going to be approved, paving the way for breaking ground next year," said Kirk.

"The facility is designed to provide care for 55,000 potential veteran patients, plus 40,000 at the Navy base and 20,000 to 25,000 Navy dependents," he said.

Kirk said some of the improvements planned at the hospital will include additional beds, clinical services and specialty care, outpatient services, laboratory and other facilities. About \$15 million already was invested last year to expand the operating room and emergency room suites and another \$20 million is earmarked this year for a new parking garage.

When completed, the new joint VA-Navy hospital will "expand the quality of health care for veterans and Navy families to state-of-the-art." He said it also will mean additional jobs for Lake County residents.

"It will add 200 new jobs to North Chicago, but most importantly it will help ensure the veterans hospital never closes," he said.